

Assistive Technology



Picture Exchange
Communication System (PECS)

Created by Marcia Sterner
Orange County Public Schools
Assistive Technology Team

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Communication System (PECS)

Created by Marcia Sterner, FDLRS Region 3
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The purpose of PECS is to provide a beginning functional communication system and to promote spontaneous initiation of communication. It is used primarily with students who do not imitate or initiate communication. (Note: It should not be confused with Picture Communication Symbols (PCS) which are the symbols in the BoardMaker software program.) The PECS program was developed by Lori Frost & Andrew Bondy (1994). There are 6 phases to the program. It is important to note that not all students will need to go through all 6 phases. Once they are initiating communication consistently it may be helpful to introduce manual communication boards or voice output communication devices.

For more information on PECS go to www.pecs.com

These cards are a guide to help you move through the phases once you are familiar with the PECS program.

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PECS—Phase 1 The Physical Exchange

Objective: Student picks up a picture of a desired item, reaches for the communication partner's hand and places the picture in the partner's hand.

What it looks like: As a student reaches for the desired item the facilitator (a second person from behind) assists the student to pick up the picture and give it to the communication partner who provides an open handed cue. This action is treated as a communicative attempt and responded to as such "Oh you want a drink, here it is."

Tips:

- Identify items and activities that the student is interested in but only present one choice at a time
- Develop a picture set for those items/activities
- Use naturally occurring activities throughout the day
- No verbal prompts are provided because they are difficult to fade
- Quickly reward student's communication by providing the desired item
- Give a small portion of an item or remove the item so it can be requested again
- Stop sessions before the student tires of the item.
- Fade assistance quickly

****Move to Phase 2** when the student is consistently and independently exchanging a picture for a desired item.

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PECS—Phase 2 Expanding Spontaneity

Objective: Student will go to his/her communication book/board, pull the picture of the desired item off, take it to the communication partner and release it in the partner's hand.

What it looks like: Partner moves away from student requiring student to get up and move toward the partner. This phase develops persistence in delivering the picture.

Tips:

- Create a communication board/book with Velcro on the front cover and on pages inside to store pictures
 - Expand vocabulary in the picture set by attending to student interests
 - Expand number of communication partners and environments
 - Continue to use only one symbol on board at a time
 - Use naturally occurring activities throughout the day
 - Trainer returns picture to board/book once exchange is completed
 - Gradually increase distance between student and book
 - Gradually increase distance between student and communication partner
- **Move to Phase 3 when the student is consistently bringing the picture of the desired item to the communication partner.**

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 - Gradually increase distance between student and communication partner
- **Move to Phase 3 when the student is consistently bringing the picture of the desired item to the communication partner.**

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PECS—Phase 3 Picture Discrimination

Objective: Student will request a desired item by going to the book/board, selecting a picture from an array and giving it to the communication partner.

What it looks like: Student chooses picture from an array on the book/board and gives it to the communication partner.

Tips:

- Present a picture of a non-preferred item with a picture of a highly desired item
- Gradually increase # of pictures in array
- No verbal prompts are provided
- Can develop theme or activity boards and place them in the environment or in the book
- Use environmental arrangement (ex. desired items out of reach) to increase requesting opportunities

****Move to Phase 4 when the student is able to discriminate among a variety of pictures.**

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PECS—Phase 4 Sentence Structure

Objective: Student requests present/non-present items by creating a multi-word phrase on a sentence strip and delivering it to the communication partner.

What it looks like: Student takes a sentence strip and places the symbol for "I want" along with the desired item and hands it to the communication partner.

Tips:

- Create a sentence strip (use a color to contrast with the book) and attach it to book/board with Velcro
- At first place the "I want" symbol on the strip for the student. The facilitator, from behind, prompts the student to place the picture of the desired item on the sentence strip. Once the student is doing this independently begin to teach the student to place the "I want" symbol on the strip themselves.
- When the communication partner receives the strip they turn it toward the student and say "You told me, 'I want computer.'" while pointing to the pictures
- The communication partner returns the symbols to their appropriate location
- Use a variety of activities with a variety of partners
- No verbal prompts are provided
- Start placing desired items out of sight

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PECS—Phase 5 Responding to “What do you want?”

Objective: Student spontaneously requests a variety of items and answers the question “What do you want?”

What it looks like: Communication partner asks “What do you want?” while pointing to the “I want” symbol. Student should pick up the “I want” card, place it on the sentences strip, add the symbol for the desired item, and hand it to the communication partner.

Tips:

- Fade the pointing cue as soon as possible
- Student should continue to be encouraged to spontaneously request items without being prompted

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PECS—Phase 6 Responsive & Spontaneous Commenting

Objective: Student appropriately answers "what do you want?" "What do you see?" "What do you have?" and similar questions when asked randomly.

What it looks like: Communication partner holds up an item while asking "what do you see?" and pointing to the "I see" picture. Student should pick up the "I see" picture and put it on the

sentence strip along with the item presented. Student may need to be guided through this initially. Introduce the "what do you have?" question in the same way. Once student responds consistently begin randomly asking different questions.

Tips:

- Create an "I see" and an "I have" picture for use on the book/board
- Fade prompts quickly
- Introduce other questions (ex. "What is it?")
- Encourage spontaneous commenting without a question cue. This can be modeled for the student. Reading a book provides nice opportunities for commenting.
- Start to move away from the stimulus-response format and make the communication more natural and functional.
- This phase introduces communication for the purpose of social connection going beyond requesting

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